

By the Book... continued

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Doug had to know what options he had concerning Social Security and what he stood to gain or lose by accepting a full-time job. These things can be very confusing and difficult to understand, so Voc Rehab has specialists on hand that can help explain it and explore options.

When he applied for a position as a librarian at Vatterott College, Doug was ready. His qualifications and preparedness helped him land the job. Today, he reports, “I’m really happy with how things are going.” He is passionate about his career and very involved with the day to day needs of the college. He is working hard to improve the selection at the library and enhance communication between college libraries.

His involvement with Voc Rehab wasn’t over as soon as he found a job, however. Anissa reports, “We had

him start coming in weekly to meet with Frankie Charles, Retention Specialist, so they could discuss any job related issues and work on ways of handling situations as they come up.”

The specialists offer encouragement or practical help, because they know sometimes holding on to a job is the toughest part. Anissa is excited to watch his progress and said, “Doug is very much enjoying his new job in the field he has always loved and is respected by his new co-workers.” Anissa is proud Doug will soon finish a trial work period with Social Security and end SSDI benefits.

Doug comments on his experience with Voc Rehab staff, “I’ve always enjoyed working with the people,” he said. “They’ve been very professional.” □

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By the Book

Omaha Man's Triumph

“I’m very ambitious,” Doug McElwain admitted. That became clear when Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab) in Omaha first heard his story. Doug has learned to compensate for many difficult situations; among them his experiences with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Tourette Syndrome, and a hearing impairment. Although Doug was qualified to receive help from Social Security, he was determined to give full-time employment another go.

Most of Doug’s prior work experience was in a library setting, but his OCD made retention extremely difficult. Voc Rehab encouraged Doug to consider part-time options, or possibly employment in a different field, but he had already established goals. Anissa Jenkins, one of Doug’s employment specialists at Voc Rehab, remembers his drive and motivated attitude. “Doug decided he did not wish to pursue other areas but give library work one more try,” she said.

The first step was to address any problems that hindered Doug in his previous library positions. Because he experiences a hearing impairment, he sometimes speaks quite loud. Anissa

remembered finding the solution to this problem, and said, “...the hearing aids he had were old and not sufficient. We helped him get a new pair, so that his hearing and speech would not be the barrier they had been in the library setting.” With that basic challenge met, Doug and Voc Rehab could move on to job skills.

“One of the areas he had trouble with on the job was the use of computer technology,” Anissa commented. “...We had him work in our computer lab to gain more familiarity and comfort with this area.” Voc Rehab offers its clients extensive help in this area, because it is such a big part of employment in today’s tech-savvy job market.

Joy Dobrauc was another employment specialist that facilitated the job search, and Doug said appreciatively, “Joy worked extensively on helping me update my resume.” Since a resume is often the first point of contact with an employer, Voc Rehab knows how important professional help to create an appealing first impression can be. They also helped Doug to prepare for his interviews.

Another valuable service that Voc Rehab provides is benefit analysis.

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Doug McElwain

“I’m really happy

with how things

are going.”

Business Options

It's a snap for Broken Bow Woman

Beverly (Bev) Burt had been a photographer for over 30 years when she suffered a stroke in May, 2003.

The stroke combined with arthritis and high blood pressure robbed the Broken Bow woman of strength and stamina. When tired, Bev couldn't focus her eyes. She fumbled with film loading the camera. She couldn't handle the physical demands of her life's work.

The idea of starting over was terrifying. Bev thought there was nothing she could do. Then a counselor she was seeing for stroke-related depression suggested she call Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab). Independent and self-reliant, Bev found it very difficult to ask for help. But in October, 2003, she contacted the Kearney office for Voc Rehab and the picture began to change.

Bev worked with Employment Specialist Keri Bennett. "Bev is a gifted photographer and also has a strong head for the business end of things," said Keri. "Bev didn't let anything become a barrier that she couldn't overcome.

"Everybody I dealt with at Voc Rehab was so supportive and encouraging," Bev said. "It really helped my outlook... (and that) has affected my recovery and my ability to work."

Through Voc Rehab, Bev discovered she could continue in photography by changing her equipment and photographic product.

Keri brought in a business consultant to help Bev develop a business plan. They quickly figured out what she needed and where to get it. Bev had her new equipment by summer, 2004.

Bev got a digital camera, a scanner, and photo-related software. The camera was lightweight and featured autofocus. She no longer had to worry about loading film or using a tripod. She could use faster shutter speeds. She didn't need to submit negatives to a lab for scanning.

"(Vocational Rehabilitation) helped me realize that I had a lot of options."



Beverly Burt

raphy to her services, since she can now shoot and print the photos herself.

Bev restores old photos, too, a process she has enjoyed since childhood. Today, her results are better than ever because scanning allows her to gain quality.

Keri found Bev to be self-reliant and direct— not the kind of person to give up. She was glad Bev could get back to work without having to relocate or commute.

"(Voc Rehab) helped me realize that I had a lot of options, and it was a matter of choosing what was going to be best for me," Bev said. □

Other photographers told Bev to expect a year of working with the digital equipment before she quit using film, but she hasn't used film since last August. "I just loved it the minute I got it," she said.

Weddings use to be a third of her business. Now her mainstay is photographing children and families. This involves much shorter work sessions. Bev can easily reschedule when she's having a bad day.

Bev also photographs football and basketball team members. With the digital system, she can see the images before ordering prints, avoiding costly mistakes. She has added passport photog-

Plan Now to Attend

"Going To Work" Forums!

Mark your calendar now. Forums will be held in April across the state of Nebraska to provide information you won't want to miss. The "Going to Work" forums will include:

- Information regarding incentives and resources available to assist individuals with disabilities in going to work.
- Information for employers regarding the advantages of hiring persons with disabilities.
- Opportunities for attendees to provide input on Vocational Rehabilitation services.

Forums are open to everyone and there is no cost to attend. They will be held from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. in the following locations:

April 4, 2006 Omaha Holiday Inn Central

April 11, 2006 Kearney Ramada Inn

April 18, 2006 North Platte Sandhills Convention Center (Quality Inn & Suites)

April 25, 2006 Scottsbluff Hampton Inn

For more information, contact Tim Kolb at (308) 425-3741 or at timkolb@frontiernet.net. These forums are sponsored by a Nebraska Infrastructure Grant to promote the Ticket to Work program. Information regarding Nebraska's Ticket to Work program may be found at nebraskatickettowork.org.

New Beginnings

The Path to Independence in Hastings

Arthur Anthony was at a crossroads. The drug and alcohol abuse that had defined his life for so long had cost him his job. Finally, he was ready and realized that it was time to seek help, and make an investment in his future.

What better place to start, than Crossroads Center Rescue Mission in Hastings, Nebraska? The Mission offered substance abuse counseling,

life skills classes, and the option to do community service. Throughout the program, clients learn to refocus their lives in a positive direction, seek employment, pay off debts, and save money of their own.

Crossroads referred Arthur to the Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab) office in Grand Island. Tracy Middleton, Arthur's Employment Specialist at Voc Rehab, was optimistic. "Arthur had a good work history, just came on bad times." She and Arthur began by working through the Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) notebook, which helps clients identify issues before applying and interviewing for jobs.

As a result, Arthur had a better idea about what to do next. "I had to go back to doing what I knew how to do, and Voc Rehab helped me," he said. He applied at Nebraska Aluminum Casting because he was familiar with

"(Voc Rehab) They helped me tremendously and I can never repay them for all they did for me."



Arthur Anthony

that kind of work. His experience and preparedness landed him the job in no time. He was thrilled.

Arthur wasn't finished with Voc Rehab, however. He and Tracy had to settle on solutions to some practical problems. Arthur had lost his license and needed a way to get to and from work. Voc Rehab was able to assist him in this area, as well. They offered him temporary financial assistance with transportation and the problem was solved, Arthur was ready to begin working.

He settled into his new position and learned the ins and outs of the job. "I make aluminum parts," he said. Even his job was a reflection of his new attitude to be creative and productive. Things were going well, but Tracy continued to keep in touch. She and Arthur talked weekly and addressed needs or concerns that he had. Tracy was also in contact with Nebraska

Aluminum Casting to answer any of their questions and ensure continued progress for Arthur.

So much has happened since Arthur was at Crossroads. He now lives on his own and manages his own transportation. As his immediate needs are met, and his self-esteem bolstered by this newfound independence, Arthur can focus on his future. He is making goals and plans to retain Voc Rehab as a strong ally for his future. Appropriately, he hopes to one day become a counselor. "I want to help people that are in the position I was in," Arthur enthused. He hopes that school may be in his near future.

Tracy said, "Arthur is a very determined young man who knows what he wants and knew he needed supports to be successful." Arthur values the professional relationship that he and Tracy have established. "She was real helpful for me," he remarked. He feels that Voc Rehab gave him "...another chance at life."

He has made important life changes and knows now that he can overcome any obstacle. Arthur credits Voc Rehab, saying, "They helped me tremendously and I can never repay them for all they did for me. □